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ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

RESPONSE TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION'S ANNOUNCEMENT ON HERITAGE LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IN ONTARIO

DECEMBER 1988

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association is pleased to respond to the Minister of Education's announcement on Heritage Language programs in Ontario.

Our Association recognizes that Ontario is a province rich in cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage. This multicultural reality has been, and will continue to be, reflected in Ontario's educational system. OPSBA recognizes that changes are required in the current program, especially in the areas of curriculum enrichment and staff development and agrees with the need for new forms of support for school boards to assist them in further developing existing programs.

OPSBA will respond to each of the proposed Ministry initiatives in this area: school board provision of heritage language programs and the open access provisions of these programs, in-service training, the development of a program resource guide and learning materials, and research and information gathering and sharing.

MANDATORY HERITAGE LANGUAGES PROGRAMS

It has been proposed that, due to the lack of access to the current program for some children:

> Each school board operating elementary schools will be required to provide, on a continuing education basis or on a purchase from another school board, a program in a particular heritage language as the result of parental request.
>
> A program will be provided, at the board's choice of location, within 90 days of receiving a written request for instruction in a particular language from parents of 25 pupils.
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> These pupils must be enrolled and/or be eligible to be enrolled in the primary, junior or first two years of the intermediate divisions of the board.

OPSBA recognizes the importance of the heritage languages program and supports the efforts of the Ministry of Education to improve the current

program. However, OPSBA is fundamentally opposed to these programs being mandated and has a number of concerns with regard to the mandatory provision of heritage language programs by local school boards:

1. The mandatory establishment of heritage language programs undermines local school board autonomy and ability to respond to local community concerns. There is the implicit assumption that the vast majority of school boards are in some way denying young people the opportunity to learn and appreciate their heritage language. This is not the case; school boards have been, and will continue to be, responsive to local community demands for education.

2. No other continuing education program is mandated by the Ministry of Education. Are mandated continuing education programs in other areas such as adult education to be the next step?

3. The proposal that instruction in a particular language must be provided if the parents of 25 children request it, is impracticable. Included in this number would be children in all age categories and abilities and could include students from all parts of a large school district. Although not supporting mandatory programs, if they are to be required then they should only be required when the parents of 25 students from a given Division request the program.

4. Children with no background in the heritage language would be able to request this program. This represents an abuse of the original intention of providing heritage language programs and should not be forced on Ontario's school boards.

5. Currently, heritage language programs are optional and any transportation costs are the responsibility of the parent or guardian. If these programs are made mandatory, the onus to provide and pay for transportation must remain with the parents or guardians. If school boards are required to provide busing for students, this could prove more costly than the program itself, especially in sparsely populated areas.

6. There are funding implications. It is proposed that funding of the heritage languages program be maintained at current levels. That is, $36.00 per hour for each class of 25 pupils with a reduction of 85 cents per pupil under a class size of 25. This funding level may be inadequate, particularly in light of the recent Supreme Court decision regarding the definition of a teacher and whether continuing education teachers are covered under the provisions of Bill 100. Funding levels must be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that heritage language programs do not place an additional burden on the local property tax base.

7. For many heritage languages there are no available qualified teachers. Ontario's universities and colleges do not have the programs to provide qualified staff for boards to hire.

8. School boards do not have the supervisory staff with language facility to evaluate and supervise the heritage language programs.

9. Adequate approved resource materials are not available for the many heritage language programs that potentially must be offered.

OPSBA, therefore, recommends that heritage language programs continue to be optional programs offered on a continuing education basis with school boards having the primary responsibility for staffing, supervision, curriculum, number and location of classes and when these programs are to be offered.

OPEN ACCESS PROVISIONS

OPSBA supports the provision that has been made for children from public school boards to attend heritage language classes in other public school boards without the payment of fees. However, we can only support this provision if the level of provincial funding is adequate to cover the <u>full</u> costs of these programs. Local taxpayers should not be required to subsidize programs for children from other school board jurisdictions.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

It is proposed that:

> The Ministry will provide a three-year incentive fund to encourage school boards, in partnership with other agencies and groups, to sponsor in-service opportunities for heritage language instructors and their administrative, supervisory and resource personnel.

OPSBA supports the Ministry initiative in the area of in-service training but a three-year incentive fund is inadequate. Since there will exist an ongoing need for in-service training of heritage languages personnel, funding must also be provided on an on-going basis.

PROGRAM RESOURCE GUIDE

To provide for the sharing of resources, the Ministry proposes to:

> produce a program resource guide in English and in French that will be of general assistance to school boards and heritage languages personnel in establishing or further developing the heritage languages program.

It is further proposed that this initiative will be implemented through:

> a) the establishment of an advisory committee, composed of representatives of school boards, other institutions and the ministry, who have had experience in heritage languages programs and who will provide guidance on the development of the resource guide;
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> b) the provision of a draft of the resource guide for reaction and input from school boards, provincial organizations and other associations;
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> c) the introduction and highlighting of the published edition of the resource guide through provincial and regional meetings.

OPSBA supports the Ministry initiatives in this area and is pleased that an extensive mechanism for consultation and response is included in the proposal. We wish to stress, however, that representation on the Ministry Advisory Committee must reflect the diverse nature of the school boards throughout the province, including large and small, urban and rural, and northern and southern boards.

DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNING MATERIALS

In recognition of the need for appropriate learning materials for students in heritage languages classes the Ministry proposes to:

> provide a five-year incentive fund for the development of student learning materials, in print, non-print and software formats, that meet criteria established for Ontario's Heritage Language Program.

Funding will be provided to cover up to 50 per cent of costs related to the development, pre-production and first-run of materials.

OPSBA recognizes the need for the development of appropriate learning materials, and supports the Ministry initiative in this area. However, more information is required on the mechanism for the setting of the criteria for Ontario's Heritage Languages Program. There are no indications as to who is to set the criteria and to evaluate the learning resources based on these criteria. OPSBA recommends that the mandate of the Ministry Advisory Committee be extended to fulfill this function.

OPSBA further recommends that 100% of the costs should be covered and believes that a five-year incentive fund will not be sufficient. Since there will exist an ongoing need for learning resources, funding must also be provided on an ongoing basis.

RESEARCH

To provide and share a range of information relevant to heritage instruction, it is proposed the Ministry provide incentives for research and for the gathering and sharing of information related to Heritage Languages Programs.

OPSBA supports the Ministry initiative in the areas of research into heritage languages programs.

SUMMARY

In summary, OPSBA would like to stress that:

1) Ontario's school boards have demonstrated and will continue to demonstrate, a commitment and responsiveness to requests for heritage languages programs in his province. This makes it unnecessary to make these programs mandatory.

2) If they are to be mandated and open access provisions applied, then funding for heritage language programs must be adequate to cover the full cost of these programs.

3) The Ministry initiatives in the areas of in-service training, curriculum development and research into heritage languages programs, for the most part, are positive steps in assisting school boards in developing existing programs. However, funding for these initiatives needs to be provided on an ongoing, rather than interim, basis.